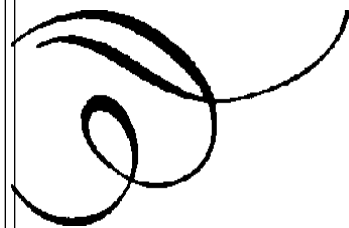


PR FOCUS ON PATRONS WITH DISABILITIES: THE ISU APPROACH

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Indiana State University's (ISU) Library staff are constantly trying to find ways to provide better service to all patrons. Informally, the staff noticed that there seemed to be more students with disabilities on campus, but they didn't see a substantial number using the Library. Discussion and speculation did not answer questions raised about the number of students on campus with disabilities, the services that they needed, or what outreach the Library could provide to this group of users. The staff realized that they needed to investigate these observations and determine if they were accurate. The Public Relations (PR) Team, under the leadership of the Public Relations Coordinator, together with the Library ADA Compliance Coordinator, provided the spark needed to investigate and address the needs of students with disabilities.

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM AND INITIATING STRATEGIES

Statistics were gathered about the number of students with disabilities. We learned that Indiana's percentage of children with disabilities in the public schools has risen 1.2% in the past 5 years. The average percentage of children with disabilities in Indiana public schools is 14.5% while the national average is only 12.9%.¹ Indiana had risen from 15th place to 10th place in the number of school-aged children with disabilities compared to other states.² Data showed that ISU students who self-identified as having a disability increased 14% from 2000 to 2001. We also learned that ISU's Disabled Student Services (DSS) estimates that approximately one-half of the students eligible for services disclose their handicap; therefore many more students than we were aware of need services. Since the number of school-aged children students with disabilities is steadily increasing and the number of ISU students has dramatically increased, the Library decided to become more proactive in publicizing the Library's accommodations.

The Coordinators developed an informal list of questions to determine what services the Library should offer. Services such as pulling books and photocopying

were easy to institute; making the Library's Website ADA compliant and having fewer physical barriers were a little more difficult. After the Coordinators had a discussion with the director of DSS, it was found that DSS student lab assistants were trying to assist students in accessing library services, but within a small DSS office with only two workstations that did not have all of the Library databases available.

Once specific accessibility problems were identified, the Library's ADA Coordinator and PR Coordinator decided that they needed to better inform the ISU community about available Library accommodations such as the TDD telephones and dedicated workstations with assistive technology and ZoomText software which enlarges text and has an audible Web page reader.

It became apparent that some of the accommodations could be provided by a combined effort of campus and community services; therefore, the basic idea was expanded to include the local community in our planning process. The PR Team met and brainstormed different ways to inform the campus and community about Library accommodations. The PR Team and the Coordinators decided that the Library would sponsor a Disability Awareness Month in March of 2001.

DISABILITIES AWARENESS MONTH OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of the month long disability awareness campaign was to raise campus and community awareness concerning people with disabilities and to publicize Library services for students who have disabilities. The Coordinators specified the target audience(s), with or without disabilities, as ISU students, administrators, faculty, staff, the citizens of the Wabash Valley, and other Indiana groups providing accommodations. The Library's Public Relations Coordinator and a member of the PR Team designed and mounted a March Library Homepage for the Library with related disability information and links (<http://library.indstate.edu/disability/>). Links were made to selected disability resources such as Delta Sigma Omicron Inc. (a national service fraternity), Job Accommodation Network, Indiana Protection and Advocacy Services, and the Council on Law and Higher Educa-

tion. Various visual symbols for access to low vision, accessibility, Braille and others were shown on the web page so that the viewer could mouse over the symbol and the meaning of the symbol would pop up.

The PR and ADA Coordinators designed accommodations brochures, bookmarks, and flyers. The Coordinators gathered and organized materials from the Library, campus, and other accommodation providers such as the Wabash Independent Living and Learning (WILL) Center, which were then displayed for distribution in the main lobby of the Library. A closed-caption video on communicating with people who have disabilities was shown as part of the display. The PR Coordinator synchronized the Library's disability awareness activities with the state's disability initiatives. The Indiana Protection and Advocacy Service provided promotional materials, pins, and posters publicizing the Disability Awareness Month.

During this month, the Library's ADA Coordinator assisted students in the formation of a local chapter of Delta Sigma Omicron (DSO), the national advocacy group for students with disabilities. This was an important step because students with disabilities often do not need to self-advocate before college since public elementary and high school systems are mandated by law (The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 - IDEA '97) to test and supply accommodations to all eligible students. Many students with disabilities do not realize that they must become self-advocates once in college. DSO helps students learn the necessary advocacy skills. The Library helped prepare the publicity announcing the initial meeting of the local DSO.

INITIAL MEETING OF DSO

The PR and ADA Coordinators arranged and prepared the Mayor's proclamation, declaring March as Disability Awareness Month to be delivered during the initial meeting of DSO. ISU's President, Dr. Lloyd Benjamin, and other local dignitaries, were invited to the DSO's first meeting. The PR Coordinator arranged



Above: Delta Sigma Omicron Officers and Sponsors at Initial Meeting

for the local TV stations (WTHI and WTOO) and the campus and local newspapers to cover the event.

The Library also sponsored a trip of the DSO to visit the University of Illinois' Division of Rehabilitation Education Services (DRES) office and to the DSO Parent Chapter. Digital pictures of both the initial meeting and trip to the University of Illinois were taken for promotion for the Library and for DSO. The Library used the pictures in their submission for ALA's Public Relations John Cotton Dana Award competition. The newly formed student advocacy group became a conduit for reaching out to students and the community.

INITIAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

During the preliminary investigation of the needs of students with disabilities in 2001, it was apparent that the Library staff required more training in communicating with and accommodating such students. The Library's administration addressed this problem by providing staff development sessions on accommodation. At one Library staff development session, the video *The Ten Commandments of Communicating With People With Disabilities*, produced by Irene M. Ward & Associates, was shown. After this viewing, staff felt more confident in providing on-the-spot accommodations and they also wanted to know more about serving the students with disabilities. Three Library teams in conjunction with DSS and ISU's Affirmative Action Office co-sponsored a national teleconference called *Emerging Disabilities on Campus: What You Need to Know*. The Library provided the publicity for this teleconference to all the local colleges and community leaders. Many from ISU, Rose Hulman Institute of Technology, and St. Mary-of-the-Woods College administrators attended and became better informed about their school's legal responsibilities. Library staff directly involved with making ADA decisions met with the DSS, the Affirmative Action Office and the University lawyer to assess the appropriateness and legality of proposed accommodations for Library patrons. The accommodations that the Library proposed were found to be legal; therefore, the Library implemented them.

RESULTS OF HEIGHTENED AWARENESS

In March 2002, Mayor Judy Anderson's proclamation of March as Disability Awareness Month took place in her office in order to have enough room for various community ADA leaders. The DSO and the Library ADA Coordinator were among those invited. The University's cooperative efforts between organizations on campus and in the community expanded for 2002's March Disabilities Awareness Month, making this year's recognition and celebration bigger and better. University administrators provided door prizes to encourage students to "try on a disability" during a special evening event planned by DSO to raise awareness and to

educate others. The Wabash Independent Living and Learning Center provided encouragement, ideas, and speakers for these activities.

Internally, the publicity put consideration of students with disabilities in the spotlight. Consequently, other Library teams consistently take such students' needs into account when new hardware and software is being considered for use in the Library. The Library's Web pages are designed with ADA compliance in mind, and the homepage now has a prominent link to the Library's accessibility services. Some Library services under consideration could be easily expanded so that students with disabilities could be accommodated. For example, the Library built a wireless network primarily for users with laptops and PDA's. The software on the wireless appliances is ADA compliant. The freedom of movement that wireless technology offers, coupled with assistive hardware and software, makes the Library more accessible.

In April of 2002, the ADA Coordinator and the Library Americans With Disabilities Act Compliance Team (LADACT) planned a training session for all Library staff about how to better serve students with disabilities. The Library invited the librarians from St. Mary-of-the-Woods College, Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, IVY Tech State College -Terre Haute, and Vigo County Public Library to attend this training session. The speaker, Robin Jones, Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant of the Great Lakes Disability and Business Technical Assistance Center, presented a workshop on accommodation. This was a daylong workshop divided into morning and afternoon sessions. The entire Library staff was required to attend the morning session and a select group of Library staff plus the guest librarians were invited to the afternoon session. The goals of the morning session were to raise awareness that people with disabilities are people first and to become more knowledgeable about serving people with disabilities. The goals of the afternoon session were to become better informed about people with learning, mental and emotional disabilities and to formulate possible accommodations.

The ISU Library has become a pro-active leader in campus disability issues and accommodation. Student knowledge has increased about what accommodations are available in the Library, on campus, and in the community, allowing students with disabilities greater flexibility in receiving appropriate services. Library staff have a better understanding of why and how to refer students to the Library ADA Compliance Coordinator. Staff know what accommodations they can automatically provide and how to provide them. With each disability accommodation or universal design implementation, the Library creates a friendlier user environment that will help all students.

The Library Administration as well as the ADA Compliance Coordinator and LADACT credit the PR Coordinator and the PR Team's effective handling of publicity for the improved knowledge of Library accommodations. These promotions significantly enhanced ISU Library's image as a pro-active campus leader concerning disability issues. Most importantly, students with disabilities are highly visible in the Library and have significantly increased their use of the Library and its resources. The Library accommodation statistics show an increase of 200%, which was the primary objective of the promotions. Conversely the Library realizes that our work is never done. We need to continually address new issues brought forward regarding the needs of students with disabilities while continually publicizing what we are able to do to accommodate them.

NOTES

¹ CQ's State Fact Finder. Washington, D. C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1998, p.201.

² CQ's State Fact Finder. Washington, D. C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2001, p.205.

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